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13 July 1961

SOME PROS AND CONS OF THE FOUR BROAD CHOICES

1. Choice No. 1.

a. Pros.

(1) Would afford Defense the greatest flexibility in readying for action the types and strengths of forces needed for demonstration of determination over Berlin, for limited war, or for general war.

(2) Would result in the earliest existence of a U. S. capability to negotiate from increased strength.

(3) Would create at once the maximum impact of U. S. determination, on the Soviets and on the world.

(4) [REDACTED]

(5) Would, if properly explained, galvanize the Congress and U. S. public opinion into support of an uncomplex, easily-understood strength buildup.

b. Cons.

(1) As an "all-out" alternative, with built-in locomotion, would tend to become irreversible (cf. 1914 and 1939) and therefore to inhibit flexibility in negotiation.

(2) Would challenge Soviet prestige and determination so early and so crudely as to choke off avenues of climb-down for them.

(3) Would badly upset our allies, perhaps to the point of open division at an early stage.

(4) U. S. public opinion, outside a few elite groups in the eastern metropolises, is not only not prepared to accept this course, but is not prepared to be led into acceptance.

2. Choice No. 2.

a. Pros.

(1) Would begin at the beginning, thus affording great flexibility for diplomacy, including negotiation, backed up by increasing strength.

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[REDACTED]

(2) Would avoid Sarajevo atmosphere, while still permitting in the interim a substantial improvement in military unit readiness and deployment.

(3) Would afford time to lead the Congress, the U. S. public, and our allies into support of our position as it moved forward.

b. Cons.

(1) Would initially limit Defense's flexibility in readying the armed forces for war or for military action short of war.

(2) Would create a built-in delay of up to four months in mounting substantial non-nuclear ground action in Central Europe, delay which might derail the whole course of events up to that point.

(3) Would tend to transmit an image of national indecisiveness or uncertainty.

3. Choice No. 3.

a. Pro.

(1) By combining, in effect, the timing features of Choices No. 1 and No. 2, would tend to afford maximum flexibility to the President in deciding on what "mix" of flexibilities to accord to military preparation on the one hand and to diplomacy-negotiation on the other.

b. Con.

(1) Like all compromises, this one lacks the full advantages but avoids the full disadvantages of the two alternatives it spans. For example, it is less likely than No. 1, but more likely than No. 2, to provoke further Soviet military build-up; it affords, contrarily, less flexibility to Defense than No. 1, but more than No. 2. This exercise in comparison can be extended to all features of No. 1 and No. 2.

4. Choice No. 4.

a. Pros.

(1) Would avoid all semblance of panicking over Khrushchev's first Roman candle or two from his newly-opened bag of fireworks.

[REDACTED]

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(3) Would be most likely of all courses to carry our allies with us.

NSC
Concurs

b. Cons.

(1) Would amount to a position of pusillanimous inaction in the face of the overt, almost contemptuous, challenge of Khrushchev.

NSC
Concurs

(3) Would reduce our leadership to the level of the least common denominator among allies who should be led into agreement, not permitted to lead.